

# THE CHALLENGE OF YODER AND HAUERWAS' THEOLOGY IN THE JAPANESE CONTEXT

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## 1. Introduction

Christianity in Japan has always remained in a minority.<sup>1</sup> Although there was some success in the early modern Roman Catholic mission to Japan in the 16<sup>th</sup> and the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, Japan closed the country for more than two centuries.

Even after the nation reopened its borders, there were times when many people came to the church. However, they left the church like the ebbing of the tide when the 'boom' was over. Often these people were quick to leave the church when they faced difficulties. Yasuo Furuya, professor emeritus of International Christian University, calls them "graduated Christians."<sup>2</sup> Furuya compares these 'graduated Christians' and Marxists in Japan, saying that both Christianity and Marxism were foreign ideologies which attracted the young. However, whilst Marxists felt guilty when they left Marxism, Christians felt little guilt when they left the church. In this way, Furuya pointed to the superficiality of Christian faith in Japan. Why did Christian faith fail to penetrate the Japanese soul?<sup>3</sup>

Christians in Japan have always been in the minority, offering the church in Japan less temptation to have a state church mentality than did the churches in Europe and North America. However, as Christianity was introduced by the Western missionaries, the Japanese church as a whole followed their way of thinking. In this essay, I am suggesting that the Japanese church has a magisterial Christianity (or state church) mentality whilst always remaining in a minority. With a few exceptions,<sup>4</sup> they adopted the state church mentality, hoping to become "chaplains to the society"<sup>5</sup> although they were never able to actualise the dream.

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<sup>1</sup> During the Roman Catholic Missions to Japan in the 16<sup>th</sup> and the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, Ebisawa suggests, there were over 300,000 Japanese Christians, some 1.3 per cent of the Japanese population. According to J. Laures, over one million Japanese were baptised between 1549 and 1639. In 1997, nearly 140 years after the restart of Christian missions in Japan, the Christian population was 1,043,011, which was less than one per cent of the Japanese population. Ebisawa 1976, 146-147; Laures 1951, 95; Shimizu 1985, 35-38; Kirisutokyô Nenkan 1997.

<sup>2</sup> Furuya 1995, 83-84.

<sup>3</sup> In this respect, we can see a stronger commitment in Roman Catholic Christians in the 16<sup>th</sup> and the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.

<sup>4</sup> One typical exception was *Mukyokai* [Non-Churchism]. Fujiwara 1999, 245-255.

<sup>5</sup> This is a term used by Yoder to depict the state church, which I explain below.

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This is a significant reason for the failure of Christianity to penetrate the soul of the Japanese, resulting in the lack of Christian commitment. This can be seen both in the historical records and in the theologies that the church produced.

## **2. Theology of Yoder and Hauerwas**

### **2.1. Basic Theological Claim**

What is Christian responsibility for the world? Hauerwas' and Yoder's answer is that Christians should trust in God in the context of the Christian belief that God (and no human) is in charge of history. We should live faithful to the biblical stories, especially to the story of Jesus. Yoder most sharply advocates this type of approach with his defence of "providence," and Hauerwas learned it from Yoder.<sup>6</sup>

Yoder asserts that Christians do not need to try to control the world by power; for God is in control of His universe, including human history. Christians should rather live as Christ lived. Social reform was not Christ's primary concern; He rather lived, trusting in God, seeking God's will, and manifesting who God is through his way of living. This is also the way His early followers tried to live.

Hauerwas accepts this basic approach. In particular he emphasizes character formation rather than decision-making, who we are rather than what we do; for who we are determines what we do.<sup>7</sup>

### **2.2. Against Constantinian Christianity**

The statement, the church should become the church, implies that the church is not what the church is to be. What is the problem, and when did the negative shift begin? Yoder asserts that the church seeks power to influence society just as the state governs by power. Yoder points out that the shift was symbolically marked by the conversion of Constantine.<sup>8</sup>

Both Yoder and Hauerwas reject the idea that the church should control the world, a view that is represented as Constantinian Christianity. They rather insist that Christians should live by imitating Christ and God. Yoder repeatedly discusses the "Constantinian reversal," which is a major theme for him.<sup>9</sup> Although the reversal certainly started before

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<sup>6</sup>Hauerwas 1984, 126.

<sup>7</sup>Hauerwas' basic theological claim, to trust in God's sovereignty, has a threefold implication: emphasis on character, narrative, and community.

<sup>8</sup>Yoder states that the shift "began before A.D. 200 and took over 200 years; the use of his [Constantine's] name does not mean an evaluation of his person or work." Yoder 1994, 57.

<sup>9</sup>The Constantinian reversal is discussed in the following articles. "The Constantinian Sources of Western Social Ethics," in Yoder 1984, 135-147; "The Otherness of the Church," in Yoder 1994, 53-64; "Peace without Eschatology?" in Yoder 1994, 143-167; and "The Kingdom as Social Ethic," in Yoder 1984, 80-101.

the year A.D. 313, the conversion of Constantine marked new characteristics in Christian history. What did Constantinian Christianity bring about?<sup>10</sup>

Firstly the church became part of the "establishment" not only in social status but also in attitude. "What changed between the third and the fifth centuries was not the teaching of Jesus but the loss of the *awareness of minority status*, transformed into an attitude of 'establishment.'" <sup>11</sup>

Secondly "the meaning of the word 'Christian' has changed." Before Constantine one had to choose to become a Christian with conviction; yet after Constantine "it would take exceptional conviction not to be counted as Christian." The church was no longer the assembly of believers; rather "the church was everybody."<sup>12</sup> Yoder calls this phenomenon "the reversal of ecclesiology and eschatology."<sup>13</sup> Before Constantine one had to believe God's sovereignty by faith; yet after Constantine the millennium appeared to be a present fact on earth in dominant Christian culture. "Even if we had found it psychologically attractive," says Yoder "the vision of a local monocultural unity [such as 'Caesaro-Papism'] could remove all subjective choice from the belief question."<sup>14</sup>

Thirdly the government came to be regarded as "the main bearer of historical movement."<sup>15</sup> Although the people of God as community were the main figure in biblical tradition, "with Constantine the civil sovereign becomes God's privileged agent."<sup>16</sup> The church becomes simply a religious division of the government. "What is called 'church' is an administrative branch of the state on the same level with the army or the post office."<sup>17</sup>

Fourthly Christian morality became double-standard. New Testament teaching was too demanding and unrealistic for the nominal Christians; and "minimal morality of the 'precepts'" was applied to them. A higher level of morality "compatible with the call of the gospel is manageable only by virtue of some degree of special motivation, usually expressed in a vocational withdrawal from ordinary life."<sup>18</sup> Yoder values the medieval church as it maintained distinctive Christian elements of otherness in the upper storey, even though they were distorted; he rather blames the magisterial Reformers who abandoned the upper level altogether including "the higher ethical commitment of the orders, the missionary and

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<sup>10</sup>LeMasters 1992, 153. Philip LeMasters articulates the errors of Constantinianism from his studies of Yoder: "(1) compromising the demands of the gospel in order for the church to gain worldly power and prestige; (2) 'baptizing' uncritically a dominant cultural order which is in tension with the exigencies of God's reign; and (3) seeing the church as just another form of human social organization with no peculiar moral identity, as not being a foretaste of the new age and distinct from the larger society." LeMasters sharply criticises Constantinianism from the believers' church perspective just like Yoder and Hauerwas.

<sup>11</sup>Yoder 1971, 129.

<sup>12</sup>Yoder 1984, 136.

<sup>13</sup>Yoder 1984, 137.

<sup>14</sup>Yoder 1984, 60. Japanese Christianity did not have this "the church was everybody" problem. Yet it was an attractive dream to them.

<sup>15</sup>Yoder 1984, 138.

<sup>16</sup>Yoder 1984, 139.

<sup>17</sup>Yoder 1994, 60.

<sup>18</sup>Yoder 1984, 83.

international character of the Roman Church,"<sup>19</sup> due to their opposition "against works righteousness and monasticism."<sup>20</sup> The Reformers simply removed the more demanding level of morality and opened the door for the 'cheap gospel'.<sup>21</sup>

Fifthly ethics fell into utilitarianism.<sup>22</sup> When the church stands on the side of the ruler, it tries to control the society, seeking "the most desirable 'for the good of the whole'" rather than seeking what the New Testament requires of the church.<sup>23</sup> "Right action is what works; what does not promise results can hardly be right." Being dominated by nominal Christians, the church no longer expected God's intervening in history and started practising the "engineering approach to ethics." "Any ethic, any tactic, is in the minds of many, self-evidently to be tested by its promised results."<sup>24</sup> This is an ethic of responsibility *to* the world, ethics from the ruler's viewpoint, and an ethics of Christianity for the majority.<sup>25</sup> Here the church is the lord over the world or God's agent to rule over the world.

Sixthly the church adopted natural morality to control society. When Constantine became a Christian, it was assumed that "in order to continue being a sovereign, he needs to continue to act the way a (non-Christian) sovereign 'naturally' acts, thereby creating some tension with what the later prophets and Jesus taught about domination, wealth, and violence."<sup>26</sup> It is presumed that "the moral insights of Gentile antiquity and the teachings of the Old Testament are for some reason closer to 'nature' than are the teachings and example of Jesus." Natural moralities were accepted because they are "more affirmative than is the

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<sup>19</sup>Yoder 1994, 59.

<sup>20</sup>Yoder 1984, 139.

<sup>21</sup>It is to be noted, however, that Luther indicated a keen interest in committed believers' house church, which was not actualised under his leadership. "Those who want to be Christians in earnest and who profess the gospel with hand and mouth should sign their names and meet alone in a house somewhere to pray, to read, to baptize, to receive the sacrament, and to do other Christian works. According to this order, those who do not lead Christian lives could be known, reprov'd, corrected, cast out, or excommunicated, according to the rule of Christ, Matthew 18 [15-17]. Here one could also solicit benevolent gifts to be willingly given and distributed to the poor, according to St. Paul's example, II Corinthians 9. . . . In short, if one had the kind of people and persons who wanted to be Christians in earnest, the rules and regulations would soon be ready. But as yet I neither can nor desire to begin such a congregation or assembly or to make rules for it. For I have not yet the people or persons for it, nor do I see many who want it. But if I should be requested to do it and could not refuse with a good conscience, I should gladly do my part and help as best I can." Luther, 1965 ed., 64.

<sup>22</sup>Yoder 1984, 140.

<sup>23</sup>Yoder 1984, 84.

<sup>24</sup>Yoder 1984, 140.

<sup>25</sup>H. Richard Niebuhr has a keen conviction about the church's social responsibility. In "The Responsibility of the Church for Society," Niebuhr asserts that the church is responsible *to* God *for* society. Just as he did in *C&C*, he rejects two extreme forms of Christianity as temptations prevalent in history: the worldly church (accommodationist) and the isolated church (exclusivist). "It [the worldly church] thinks of itself as responsible to society for God rather than to God for society" (Niebuhr 1970, 120); the isolated church "seeks to respond to God but does so only for itself." (Niebuhr 1970, 124.) Isolationism in the Church "disclaims accountability for secular societies." (Niebuhr 1970, 125) Rejecting both "attending to either extreme" and "seeking for a compromise position between them," he declares that the right way is to make clear the Church's responsibility *to* God *for* the neighbour. (Niebuhr 1970, 126.)

<sup>26</sup>Yoder 1984, 82.

New Testament about the use of coercion, violence, wealth, status, tradition, and the justification of means by ends."<sup>27</sup>

Yoder insightfully describes the state church as the "chaplain," which takes the form of either *priest* or *Puritan*. The priest chaplaincy "limit[s] himself to calling down sacramentally the blessing of God upon society, sanctioning whatever means society (or rather the prince) needs to keep society (or rather the prince's place in it) afloat."<sup>28</sup> "The [priest] chaplain is called to bless an existing power structure. . . . [He] in turn will put the stamp of divine approval upon what is being done there."<sup>29</sup> It obviously lowers moral standards. On the other hand the Puritan chaplaincy "impose[s] the right standard on a whole society."<sup>30</sup> "Those who do keep the rules are proud of it because they can; those who do not wish to keep them or cannot because of the way they are defined, are crushed or driven away." Although Puritanism enforces higher rules on everyone than the priest chaplaincy, it "concentrates its attack upon the coarse and crude sins which it is possible externally to punish or prevent."<sup>31</sup> Yoder rightly asserts that "most debates about ethics have been between the Puritans and the priests. It is between those who say that there are objective, absolute standards which must be forced on everyone, and those who say that if we have to do what we have to do we had better be able to say it is morally all right."<sup>32</sup>

Yoder rejects these chaplaincy approaches in which Christian morality is realistically diluted for everyone in the society. He rather claims that Christian ethics must be limited only to committed believers because it requires utter trust and obedience to God.<sup>33</sup> Likewise Hauerwas claims: "Christian ethics can never be a minimalistic ethic for everyone, but must presuppose a sanctified people wanting to live more faithful to God's story."<sup>34</sup>

Yoder perceives Constantinian Christianity not only in the medieval period but also in modern history. Although Renaissance, Reformation, Enlightenment, and Revolution gave significant impacts to it, and its form was reshaped each time, Yoder critically points out that the basic structure remains the same and Constantinian Christianity exists today.<sup>35</sup>

Each view along this progression is clear in rejecting the former one as having been wrong, and is blaming the blindness of earlier generations of churchmen for having accepted such identification with an unworthy political cause. This sense of rightness over against the others blinds each generation to the fact that the basic structural error, the identification of

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<sup>27</sup>Yoder 1984, 84.

<sup>28</sup>Yoder 1971, 120.

<sup>29</sup>Yoder 1971, 119.

<sup>30</sup>Yoder 1994, 344.

<sup>31</sup>Yoder 1971, 120.

<sup>32</sup>Yoder 1971, 121.

<sup>33</sup>Yoder 1964, 29.

<sup>34</sup>Hauerwas 1984, 97.

<sup>35</sup>A typical example of this century is Reinhold Niebuhr's theology. Yoder 1971, 138-139.

a civil authority as bearer of God's cause, has not been overcome but only transposed into a new key.<sup>36</sup>

Thus Yoder asserts that the church is to be a believers' church, it should always have a minority stance, and it must never try to control society from an established majority viewpoint. That is how the church originally was. He does not accept the opinion that the non-established church has a value as an antithesis to established Christianity in the West, but not in countries like Japan where Christianity has always been in a minority. "I should not ask what complementary corrective is needed from a minority perspective after granting that the majority establishment does most of the work of being the church. I should ask rather what the whole church is called to be in the world where she is (really) in a minority position."<sup>37</sup>

There is no doubt that the church intended to make the world better by Christianising it. The assumption there was that Christian culture, even in diluted forms, would be better than a pagan culture. Perhaps this is generally true. However when the church stood on the side of rulers in gaining controlling power of the world, it lost Christian distinctiveness. Both Yoder and Hauerwas rightly assert that the church must be the community of committed believers.

### **3. Japanese Situation: Magisterial Christianity**

Our question in a Japanese situation, after examining Yoder and Hauerwas' theology, is whether Japanese Christianity took on the given situation of minority status as their identity, or whether they tried to get out of it. It seems to me that the latter was the case.

The mission to Japan was re-opened in 1859, following a treaty of amity and commerce in 1858 between the Shogunate government and the United States, Netherlands, Russia, United Kingdom and France.

One significant characteristic of missionaries in this period appears in their understanding of Christianity, namely that Christianity should be the basis for a modern nation. I would call this 'magisterial Christianity.' Magisterial Christianity is a distinctive kind of Christianity which seeks confederation with the ruler. Although it is congenial to Constantinian Christianity, I prefer to use the term 'magisterial Christianity' in discussing Christianity in Japan where it has always been in a minority and has never had a chance to become a state church.

Magisterial Christianity presupposes a unity or complementarity between the church and state, and wishes to become a 'chaplain' to the nation. In Europe it appeared as a state church; and in North America it appeared as magisterial denominational Christianity. The Christianity which was brought to Japan was naturally magisterial Christianity. Although Christianity has always been in a minority in Japan, magisterial Christians hoped that

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<sup>36</sup>Yoder 1984, 143.

<sup>37</sup>Yoder 1984, 81.

Christianity would be a chaplain to the society. The church had a "fundamental attitude to play a complementary role to the government by taking sides with it and by standing up for its policies."<sup>38</sup> Dohi, well-known church historian, points out in historical documents the co-operative attitudes of the church in Japan with the government.<sup>39</sup>

Magisterial Christianity should be distinguished from imperialistic Christianity, which also existed in the Japan mission.<sup>40</sup> It held an attitude of a conqueror and imposed Western 'Christian' culture on their mission fields. Japanese Christians naturally rejected it. Magisterial Christianity could be culturally sensitive whilst maintaining its unity with the state.

Colonisation and Christian mission were inseparable, particularly in the Roman Catholic missions. They "not only went hand in hand but were two sides of the same coin." As David Bosch asserts in his comprehensive work on Christian missions, "the new word, 'mission,' [which was first used in the sixteenth century by Ignatius of Loyola] is historically linked indissolubly with the colonial era" and with the idea of a papal commissioning. "The term presupposes an established church in Europe . . . and was as such an attendant phenomenon of European expansion." The colonialism of the Protestant nations was primarily secular until the nineteenth century. The *Edo* Shogunate preferred Britain and the Netherlands to Portugal and Spain as trading partners largely because their trading was mission-free.<sup>41</sup> However in the mid-nineteenth century, by the time Christianity re-entered Japan, the colonial expansion of Protestant nations became strongly linked to Christian missions.<sup>42</sup>

There is no doubt that revivalism played a significant role in the shift. However the 'Manifest Destiny' was no less important, which was a conviction of Western nations that God had chosen them in His providence for a certain destiny to carry out His purposes. It first appeared in the early nineteenth century and was commonly shared in the heyday of mission and colonialism (1880-1920).<sup>43</sup> Bosch rightly claims that "'manifest destiny' is a product of nationalism," and further asserts:

It was only to be expected that [with the attitude of the Manifest Destiny] the nationalistic spirit would, in due time, be absorbed into missionary ideology, and Christians of a specific nation would develop the conviction that they had an exceptional role to play in the advancement of the kingdom of God through the missionary enterprise.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Dohi 1980, 245.

<sup>39</sup>Dohi 1980, 334-338, 344-345, 357-363.

<sup>40</sup>Imperialistic Christianity along with colonialism caused a nationalistic reaction from the Japanese. The evil nature of imperialistic Christianity is obvious. Here I rather focus on a kind of Christianity which appeared appealing and legitimate to both missionaries and the Japanese, namely magisterial Christianity.

<sup>41</sup>This happened in the beginning of the Edo period (1603-1867).

<sup>42</sup>Bosch 1991, 275, 228, 303.

<sup>43</sup>Bosch 1991, 298, 301. Neill regards "the heyday of colonialism" as 1858-1914. Neill 1966, 322.

<sup>44</sup>Bosch 1991, 298, 299.

The chief players of the Protestant Japan missions were Americans and British. They had a strong awareness of Manifest Destiny. In fact the notion of Manifest Destiny first appeared amongst Anglo-Saxons. Christian mission included the intention of sharing the success of the West.<sup>45</sup>

Although the United States claimed a separation of church and state, Americans were no less religious in their colonialism. As Sidney Mead claims, "the United States . . . had two religions": "the religion of the denominations" and "the religion of the democratic society and nation." The former was "commonly articulated in the terms of scholastic Protestant orthodoxy and almost universally practiced in terms of the experimental religion of pietistic revivalism"; and the latter was "rooted in the rationalism of the Enlightenment . . . and was articulated in terms of the destiny of America, under God, to be fulfilled by perfecting the democratic way of life for the example and betterment of all mankind."<sup>46</sup> Whilst the former was of Christian faith, the latter was of American civilisation. These two were interwoven in the American missions. "America's destiny came to be seen as her call to spread the amazing benefits of the American democratic faith and its free-enterprise system throughout the world, gradually transforming the world into its own image."<sup>47</sup> *Our Country* (1885) by Josiah Strong (1847-1916), Congregational minister in Wyoming, was a very popular and stirring book.<sup>48</sup> He proclaimed that the expansion of the United States was of divine providence, and Christianization of the world was the responsibility of Americans. He fitted the trend of that time.

Thus there were three elements interwoven in the Western mission: Western colonialism, Christian mission, and Western civilisation. Manifest Destiny rationalised colonialism and motivated Christian mission and 'civilising' the Japanese. There is no need to argue the evil of colonialism. Although introducing Christian faith and Western civilisation was well-meant, the Christianity of the missionaries was nationalistic and lost the sharp edge of prophetic faith to critique the fallen nature of their own nations. I have already rejected Constantinian Christianity by means of the discussion of Yoder and Hauerwas. Likewise this magisterial Christianity is unacceptable from our standard.

It was a nationalistic period in Japan as well, and the Japanese 'rightly' understood the missionaries' Christianity in that context. Missionaries did not dream that the Christian Church should be the State religion of Japan, but strongly believed in and advocated "Christianity as the spiritual basis of a nation or modern civilisation."<sup>49</sup> It was their firm conviction that in order to gain wealth like the West, Japan needed Christianity. This was

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<sup>45</sup> Bosch 1991, "It was the gospel which had made the Western nation strong and great; it would do the same for other nations. The missionaries' concern therefore was the uplift of peoples deprived of the privileges they themselves were enjoying." Bosch 1991, 293. 300.

<sup>46</sup> Mead 1963, 135.

<sup>47</sup> Mead 1963, 152.

<sup>48</sup> Strong 1891.

<sup>49</sup> Dohi 1980, 25.



an invitation to the Japanese to join a winning team rather than to create Christ-like communities in Japan, and Christianity became a means or a tool for Japan to become a successful nation. Missionaries' Christianity naturally had a triumphant and victorious flavour more than an image of the suffering servant. This seems to be a crucial reason for the Japanese superficially to understand Christianity without serious repentance and Christian commitment before God. They only imitated their mentors. Thus superficial 'Christians' came to the church in the international periods, yet they left the church in the nationalistic periods.

#### 4. Conclusion

The challenge of Yoder and Hauerwas' theology in the Japanese context is the call that the church has to be the church. Perhaps this is applicable to any other part of the world. Yet it is applicable particularly to Japan where whilst Christians have always been in the minority, the church was catering to the society in hopes of becoming more influential. During the early days of the Christian missions in Japan, they failed to realise that the church's primary function is to be faithful to the Scriptures, especially to the New Testament narratives of the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. The lack of solid, biblical Christian commitment becomes even more apparent during the persecutions in the 1930s and 1940s.

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